



# The Rhumb Line

## Maine Maritime Museum

Fall 2004

*Explore Maine's Maritime History Where It Began!*

Number 39

## A Maine Slave Voyage

by Nathan R. Lipfert, Curator & Library Director

*"A Harbour Journal at Kingston Jamaica on Board the Schooner Syren of Kennebeck"*

*"Sunday, May 10<sup>th</sup> [1795]: Remarks on Board.*

*"This day dull weather & heavy rains with thunder & lightning. Early in the morning filled our water. We expect to charter our vessel for the southard - Savanna or thereabouts - to carry three French men & some slaves, for which my Captain is to receive one thousand dollars."*

Aboard an average little schooner in the West Indies trade, sometimes events went bad fast. The log-book of the schooner *Syren* traces her maiden voyage from the Kennebec to Barbados (with lumber, shingles, and barrel staves) where she loaded hogsheads of rum then ran up to Grand Turk Island to load salt. With these cargoes the schooner came north to New Bern, North Carolina, where she discharged the salt and rum and took a freight of joists, boards, shingles and staves for Jamaica. It was April, four months into the voyage, when

she sailed for Jamaica. Arriving at Port Royal on April 30<sup>th</sup>, *Syren* ran up to Kingston the next day. It is here that their luck, and their decisions, started turning bad.

The schooner *Syren* was built at Hallowell towards the end of 1794. Her documents are not complete, so we do not know who built her, or what her dimensions were. She measured 114 gross tons, and many vessels built at Hallowell in that time period had similar tonnages, with register lengths of about 73 feet and breadths of about 22 feet. They may all have been built to the same model and moulds. Her owner was William Robinson, and Converse Lilly was her first master. The early pages of the log-book actually record the completion of the rigging and the loading of her first cargo.

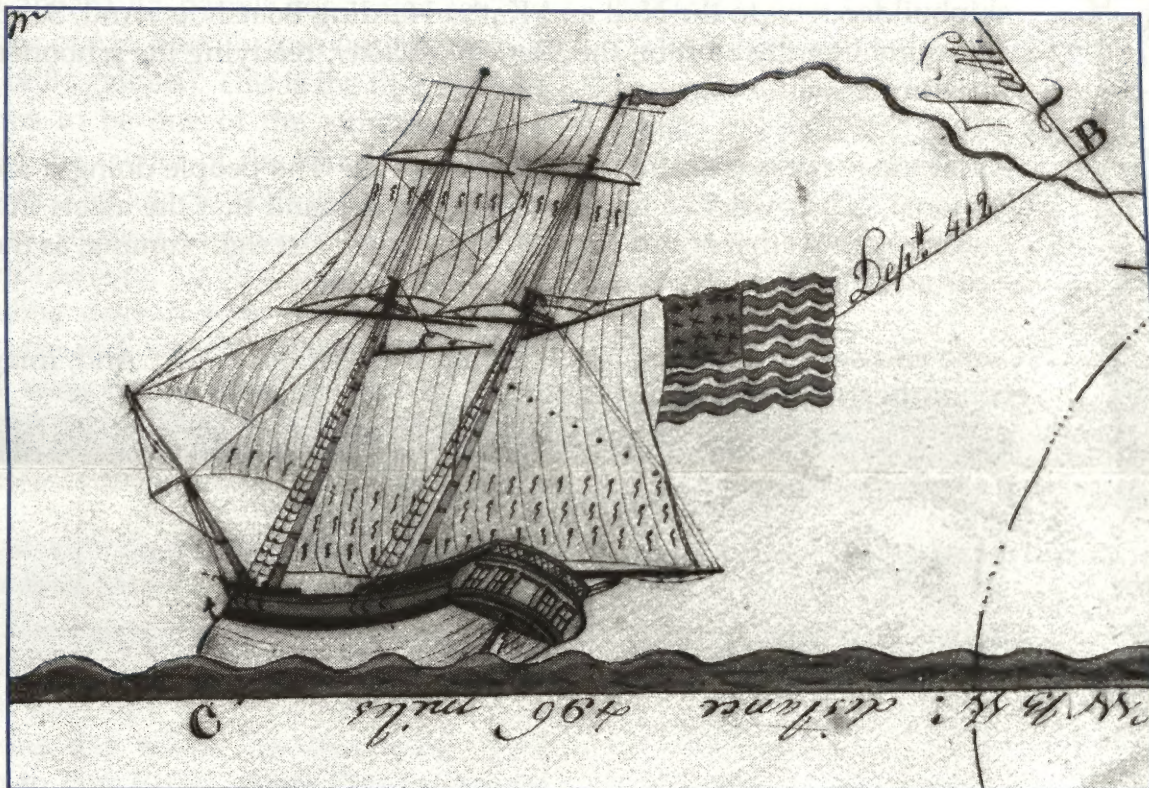
For 29-year-old Captain Converse Lilly, the voyage began in sadness. The week *Syren* was to sail his uncle Joel Reed drowned; for four days Lilly had been with the search parties, looking for the body. Captain Lilly's wife Sarah was also a daughter of the drowned man (yes, the first cousins were married). Sarah was pregnant as *Syren* set sail for the first time. Before the schooner returned, Captain Lilly had a son, Joel Reed Lilly.

The mate, Samuel Patterson, was a year younger than the captain, but like him was a native of the newly-incorporated town of Dresden, Maine. It was Patterson who kept the log-book which is the only currently-known document of this voyage. The log is currently part of the "Distant Lands of Palm and Spice" exhibit. As the record of a vessel carrying slaves, even though not involving Africa directly, it is a rare item.

As *Syren* lay in Kingston harbor on May 4, 1795, the log records that several men, including at least one master of a vessel, were pressed the previous night and carried to sea that morning. This

is a reference to the British Naval practice (Jamaica was a British colony) of impressing seamen into naval service against their will. Since trade was profitable, small vessels like *Syren* kept quiet and hoped not to be noticed. However, the schooner's crew became entirely too relaxed, and the next day's log entry included "Last night our people neglected keeping an anchor watch and all contrary to our Captain's orders." It seems odd that no names are named, but perhaps it is obvious that the mate, Patterson himself, was responsible for this thoughtlessness. There seemed to be no consequences, though.

The discharging of the cargo began on the 6<sup>th</sup>, and continued  
(continued on page 3)



*The schooner Syren may have looked similar to this. Pen and ink drawing of topsail schooner, sketched to illustrate a navigation problem circa 1805 by Dresden sea captain Francis Rittal.*

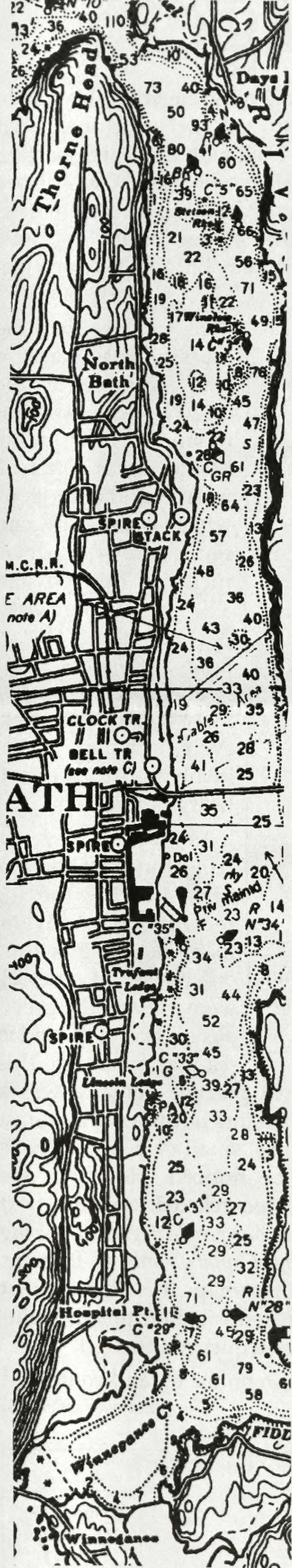
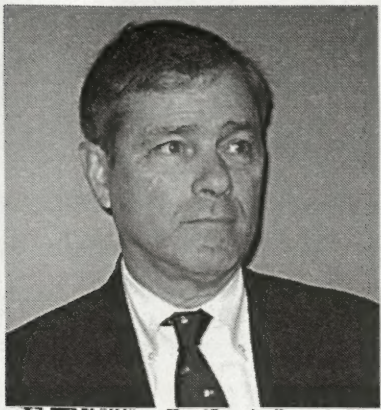
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# From The Chart Table

Voices from aloft. I don't mean metaphorically, I mean literally. I mean the sound of people talking whilst high in the rigging of a sailing vessel. Heard from on deck or on the pier near the vessel the sound is remarkable because it's coming from such an unusual direction. We frequently hear birds in the trees or the sound of rustling leaves above us, but we landlubbers or even modern mariners rarely hear people conversing way above us out in the open.

It's a wonderful sound – at once peaceful but also evocative. The work going on up there on a sailing vessel relates to its means of propulsion, to its very essence. The crew is, perhaps, making ready to get underway or it's doing maintenance needed as a result of a just-completed passage. Work aloft is essential. It can be dangerous, so it's purposeful. Also, it suggests the vessel is well-found, that its owners or officers demand she be safe to operate and that she be up to the task. If you watch someone working aloft, the aphorism, "one hand for the ship and one for yourself," is readily apparent and its two concepts made abundantly clear: the one about self-preservation is obvious, the other about the absolute necessity of lending a hand (at least one) to preserving the ship's and one's shipmates' safety or survival is sometimes less so.

Walking around the Museum's grounds this summer morning, I heard voices from aloft all over the place. Local builder Eddie Schenk and his crew were high atop the L. L. Bean Building that houses our lobstering exhibit putting on the last few shingles of that massive roofing job. John Ater's painters were priming and painting three stories up on the house of William T. Donnell, shipbuilder, next to the Ned and Kathy Harding Boatshop. And, Southport rigger, Jay Maloney, was quite literally aloft on the *Sherman Zwicker*, readying the schooner for her annual trip to the Maritimes.

All of the work is essential. It is immemorial. The people doing it are purposeful, careful, professional. The owners and/or officers DO demand that the assets involved be safe and secure. And the sounds that accompany the work seem just right coming, as they do, from a shipyard site – our very own Percy & Small.

Come and see us one day soon. See the fruits of this labor. And, imagine the voices from aloft, even if they're not there that day.

*Tom*

Thomas R. Wilcox, Jr.  
Executive Director

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# A Maine Slave Voyage (continued from page 1)

for four days. Then came the Sunday, with the momentous announcement that the schooner was to carry slaves. And three French men, which is interesting, since England was at war with France at the time. What were they doing in Kingston? Perhaps they spoke French but were actually citizens of some other country. Captain Lilly had no way of rapid communication with the schooner's owners, and was presumably free to earn money with the schooner in any legal way. Although it was then illegal to bring slaves into Massachusetts (Maine), it was not yet against federal or local law to bring them to Georgia.

On the 11<sup>th</sup>, as the discharging of the cargo continued, came a reminder that they were not on the coast of Maine – the body of “a dead Negro drifted by us.” The next day “in ye afternoon we had 60 or 70 Negros come on board; some of our men unwell today & myself.” These were the slaves, bound for Georgia. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, the last of the lumber was put ashore.

Patterson and the crew brought aboard a small cargo of two hogsheads of sugar (a hogshead is one-quarter of a tun, or 63 gallons). They brought aboard 15 barrels for water for “ye Negros” and 25 puncheons of Mr. Burril’s rum (a puncheon is a hogshead and a third, or 84 gallons). This is the first we hear of Mr. Burril, who seems to be one of the aforementioned Frenchmen and probably the owner of the slaves – certainly the man in charge of them. The log contains many uncomplimentary references to him, starting on May 19<sup>th</sup>, “Our vessel is now detained on Mr. Burril’s account.” In this case it seems to be undeserved, for succeeding days contain many accounts of obtaining provisions, cordwood, water, and other important items. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, there were two masons aboard building a camboose (Kennebec lingo for caboose, which was a vessel’s cooking fireplace or stove on deck long before it had anything to do with railroads).

“It is very sickly here. Scarcely a vessel here but has lost some men – we remain all well as yet thank God.”

On May 26<sup>th</sup> the pilot came aboard, “about half drunk.” They got underway but ran afoul of some other vessels. There was no damage, but Captain Lilly sent the pilot ashore and they waited until the following day when “the other pilot” came aboard. They ran down to Port Royal where Patterson went ashore with the schooner’s passes, to discover that the

Merchant (presumably a reference to Burril) had neglected to obtain a necessary “security passport.” Captain Lilly went to town in the evening to get one. “The Boy very sick.” The captain had to pay three dollars for “the shot we had from the fort.” There is no mention of this in the log, but this is a reference to having a shot fired across their bows to bring them to. It is hard to know whether *Syren* brought this on herself, or perhaps every vessel was fired upon, providing an income for the fort. The schooner’s people were trying to hurry their departure in order to join a convoy for protection against French privateers. They had seen a privateer stop a vessel ahead of them a day before arrival at Jamaica, and were surely anxious to avoid this trouble. However, the fleet sailed without them on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May. They were still waiting for their passengers. On the plus side, the boy seemed to be recovering.

[Friday, May 29, 1795] “This evening a boat came from a sloop and took two wenches out of our vessel. The Captain went on board the sloop & got them & was much abused by ye captain of ye sloop. He went to the gunners of ye fort and got the sloop detained for satisfaction.”

The following day the passengers must have arrived, for they got underway in company of several other latecomers, “under convoy of one frigate. We find Mr. Burril to be a very disagreeable man. He threatens to use his pistols because our men sometimes happen to rub against him when doing their duty.... To make peace we have given up the whole of the cabin to him & we all live in the steerage.” The steerage was surely a tiny area on a vessel of this size. It must have been bulkheaded off from the main hold, however, where the slaves were presumably sequestered amidst the big barrels of sugar and rum.

[Monday, June 1<sup>st</sup>] “This evening the Boy found one of his [the schooner’s] plates among Mr. Burril’s. [He] was agoing to take it but [Burril’s man] snatched it from him and throwed it overboard.” This day the schooner caught up with the main body of the convoy outside of Bluefields near Savanna-la-Mer (headed west along the south coast of Jamaica). The next few days were spent getting used to sailing with a convoy, which Patterson says they kept outsailing. It was a huge convoy – 135 vessels according to the log. The only escort vessel mentioned by name was the sloop of war *Cormorant*, a year-old Royal Navy vessel, which was accidentally blown up at Port au Prince, Haiti, the following year. It is significant that it was a British

convoy, despite the fact that many of the vessels being protected were American. The U.S. Navy, established the preceding year, did not yet have the vessels or the personnel to provide this sort of protection to our merchant vessels.

[Wednesday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>] “The boy taken sick again but thank God we have a good doctor on board.” Doctor may be a semi-sarcastic reference to one of the crew, but it probably refers to one of the passengers. The boy got better after a few days.

[Tuesday, June 9<sup>th</sup>] “Mr. Burril struck Jacob Goodin with a chair then cocked his gun at him.”

The log-keeper seemed to lose interest in the convoy and even in the evil Burril as sickness spread aboard *Syren*. The log becomes a daily litany of who was feeling poorly, who was being bled (more evidence of a genuine doctor), and who was feeling better. There was a great deal of sail handling to try to keep pace with the fleet, and it must have been miserable for the mariners who were sick. There is no real indication of what was wrong with them, and no mention of treatment, other than bleeding.

(continued on page 6)



Chart of the Jamaican harbors of Kingston and Port Royal, from The West Indian Atlas by Thomas Jefferys, published in London in 1794.



# Charlie Cahill's Canoe

By Pam Cahill (a daughter-in-law of Charlie Cahill)

The surname Cahill is hardly synonymous with the boating families known to Bath, Maine like Small, Sewall, Washburn & Doughty. People generally associate the name Cahill with Cahill's gas station and the business's patriarch Charles "Charlie" H. Cahill, Jr.

From the day "the station" opened its door in 1938 until unofficial retirement in 1992, Charlie went to "the station" every day, seven days a week. He was a bit of an eccentric, hardly ever leaving Bath, and definitely a work-a-holic. That is why, on August 11, 1941, when he packed his wife Maxine and four year-old daughter Leilani into his 1936 pick up truck for a weekend trip all the way to Bar Harbor with a side visit in Bangor it was an unusual circumstance indeed.

The troupe left Bath early on Saturday morning and headed up Route 1 to Bar Harbor where they rented a small cabin for the night. The next morning they headed out early to Old Town. On the outskirts of Old Town, Charlie eyed a man walking on the side of the road, carrying a lunch pail. He pulled over and asked the man directions to the White Canoe factory. The man asked why Charlie was interested in a White Canoe and suggested he take a look at Old Town Canoes first. As luck would have it, the man went on to explain he worked at the Old Town Canoe factory and would be happy to take the family on a tour if they would give him a lift.

After a bit of convincing, Charlie and his family agreed to give their new friend a ride and before long they were receiving a VIP tour at Old Town Canoe. The sale was quickly secured.

Now, being a bit eccentric, Charlie believed that the clothes that kept his 5 foot 110 pound frame warm in the winter also insulated him in the summer. So through several layers of clothing that included a well-worn pair of dungarees, chinos and 3 sweat-shirts Charlie dug deep, produced his brown leather envelope-style wallet and counted out the necessary cash, \$100, to pay for the canoe. Now Maxine was not all that happy with the new purchase. She had her eye on a new electric range at Gediman's Appliance Store in Bath. But the Cahill's were a traditional family of the time and her opinion did not hold much water, so to speak, and the sale held.

The chosen canoe was a beauty. Green canvas stretched over mahogany gunwales, ribs and thwarts. It had a keel, webbed mahogany seats and the purchase price included two paddles. It was 20 feet long and this in itself presented a significant problem. How did Charlie plan to get this craft home? His response was simple; "I'll just put it in the back of the truck." This was not accepted by his new friends at Old Town Canoe who insisted that they would make a canoe rack for the truck and it would take just an hour or so. Charlie left Maxine and Leilani in the parking lot and took his truck into the factory where three workers measured, sawed, manufactured and installed a custom rack for the purchase. By mid afternoon the Cahill family set out for the

return trip to Bath.

The canoe stayed on the new canoe rack atop the pickup for several days, making the trip to and from "the station" with Charlie. It was finally decided to store the boat in the basement at Charlie's parents home on High Street in Bath.

In 1962 the canoe was moved to its new home nestled high in the rafters at the gas station.

During the years that followed, both of Leilani's younger brothers tried in vain to convince their Dad that they should be the one to take the canoe on its maiden voyage. In the 1990's it became the grandsons' turn. The response was



*Sewall Hall's new look: two seasoned canoes - one (in the background), a 1902 B. N. Morris 17' sailing canoe, completely restored; the other (in foreground) a 1941 20' Old Town in factory original condition. See Pam Cahill's accompanying story about this recent acquisition.*

always the same from Charlie. "I'm going to be using that canoe at Quaker Point soon."

As Charlie's health began to decline and his knees caused the need for physical retirement, family visits often centered on canoe talk. Of all the wonderful treasures amassed over the years, the most coveted of all was "the canoe." Charlie played the game wonderfully, wondering, with a twinkle in his expressive blue eyes, "who he'd give the canoe to?" The joke was that perhaps he'd take it with him when he made his final journey.

In the end, in his fair and honest way, the canoe was left to his three children, each holding an equal share.

While all three claimed to really want the canoe, where does one put a 20-foot, 63-year-old canoe that has never been used? The Maine Maritime Museum became the logical choice. So on May 27, 2004 "the canoe," bearing the original red caution flag (albeit somewhat faded from age) that was attached by a rawhide cord 63 years earlier, finally saw water as it made its final voyage to 243 Washington Street in the rain.

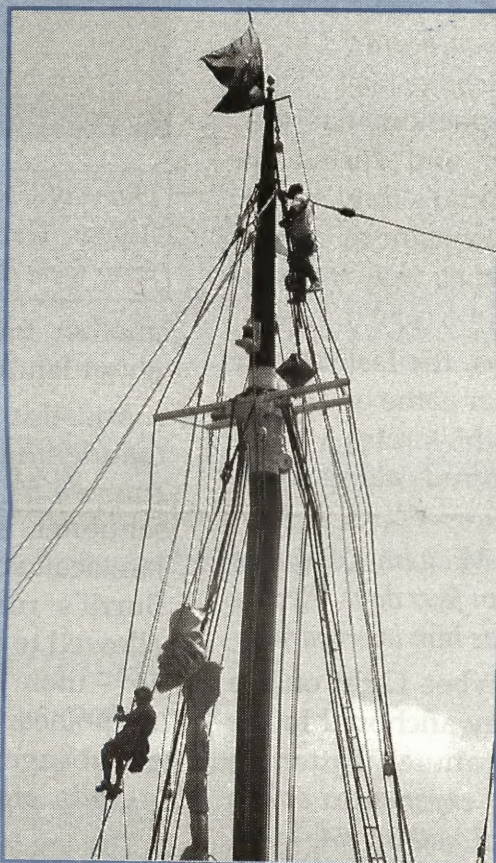


## WELCOME ABOARD!

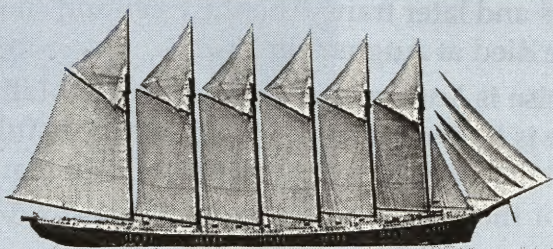
New Members May 2004 - July 2004

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 Mrs. H. A. Bourke  
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 Tim and Jorunn Buckley  
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 Sheila Herbst  
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 Fred Lantz  
 L. Randolph Lee  
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 James M. Patterson  
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 Kent Strickler  
 John and Cecily Walsh  
 Mr. John Welsh  
 The Willauer Tobey Family  
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 John and Corinne Yannone  
 Mr. William F. Zieske

## Work Aloft



*Riggers aloft in the Sherman Zwicker's rigging preparing the schooner for her upcoming trip to Nova Scotia; setting shingles atop the L.L. Bean Building; painting Donnell House.*



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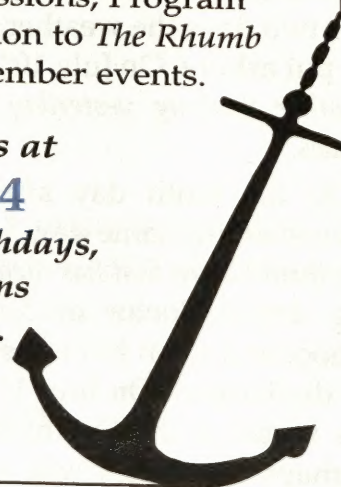
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## A Maine Slave Voyage (continued from page 3)

Jamaican ports were known for Yellow Fever, but that had a much higher fatality rate. *Syren's* people probably had a form of influenza. On June 18<sup>th</sup> Patterson noted that they were getting better, but three days later he said there was only one man aboard who was well.

There were other human beings aboard, rarely mentioned in the log. Remember the slaves? They were probably sick, too. On June 15, Patterson notes *"Buried one Negro in the Deep - a young one."* Two days later, *"We have lost another Negro child today & buried him in the Deep."* There is no indication of their living conditions, or even location aboard the vessel. No mention is made of feeding them; perhaps that was the responsibility of Burril's men. There is no mention of bringing them on deck for air and exercise, or treatment of their illness, or of their shackles, or of any other detail. Log entries treat them as thoroughly as any other cargo.

On June 17<sup>th</sup> *Syren* parted from the convoy, which Patterson believed was going in to Havana. The next week's entries are filled with references to the illness, including, at one point, the statement *"we have only one man that is well on board."* On the 24<sup>th</sup>, *"Mr. Burril sick thank God for we have some peace now."* There are occasional references to various nautical phenomena - they saw a "whirlwind" very near the schooner, and during one lightning squall there was a corposant (St. Elmo's Fire) seen at the main topgallant head. The log contains constant references to catching fish to supplement their salt meat; one wonders whether the slaves got any.

The night of the corposant, John Cleamons, the last healthy man aboard, came down sick. As the schooner came on soundings and Captain Lilly felt his way through thick rainy weather up the Georgia coast, Cleamons suffered along with Patterson and the others who were sick.

[Monday, June 29<sup>th</sup>] *"Between 3 and 4 A.M. John Cleamons departed this life after being sick a little better than four days. He was out of his head almost all last night. At 5 we hove him overboard."*

The following day the mariners sighted Tybee Light on the island of the same name, and on July 1<sup>st</sup> they anchored in the Savannah River. Twenty-eight-year-old Samuel Patterson wrote, *"Of all the passages I ever made I never experienced one so tedious & disagreeable as this from Jamaica, and now to ride quarantine is very hard, but the laws of the country must be complied with."* They were little more than a month from Jamaica. With the known prevalence of fever at Kingston, and the history of sickness aboard the vessel, they could not escape sitting at quarantine until the obviously communicable disease worked itself out.

Every port had an area where vessels were quarantined, and Savannah evidently also had some area ashore where quarantined mariners could go to stretch their legs. Fresh provisions and mail were delivered to *Syren*, and every day the slaves were taken ashore for a time, *"as the law directs"*. The officers occasionally went to town for something the vessel needed. For two days the weather was so bad that the slaves could not be put ashore. On July 10<sup>th</sup>, Patterson notes *"I hear they have had another meeting yesterday at town concerning our landing the slaves."*

On the tenth day after arrival, the quarantine ran out. However, the same day, *"At 6 P.M. died an old Negro; this makes the third Negro that has died, two of them were small."* The following day a doctor or health officer arrived and gave the schooner a clean bill of health. However, cargo was still not to be discharged. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, Capt. Lilly went to town to enter the vessel at the Customs House *"although he was very sick."* Perhaps his illness was a little too obvious, for on July 16<sup>th</sup>



Home of Captain Converse Lilly on Dresden Neck in Dresden, Maine. This photograph was taken in 1958 when the house and farm were owned by Wilson Ryder.

another town meeting was held, at which a final decision about landing the slaves was not made.

And this is where the log ends - the last few pages have maddeningly fallen off. A second volume of the log begins on August 5<sup>th</sup>, with *Syren* approaching the Maine coast. The schooner arrived back in the Kennebec River with the Jamaican sugar, and ballast taking the place of the slaves and Burril's rum, on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1795. Obviously, Burril was allowed to bring the slaves permanently ashore soon after July 16<sup>th</sup> - there really was not time for any other solution. Research in the near future will explore the possibility of documenting the voyage from the Savannah end, through newspapers, port records, etc.

The log is part of a collection of Samuel Patterson's papers at Maine Maritime Museum (MS-70). Patterson soon became a master mariner in his own right, commanding coastal sloops and schooners and later trans-Atlantic brigs and ships, until at least 1819. He died at Augusta in 1849.

Not much else is known of Captain Converse Lilly's seafaring career. He is known to have become a successful farmer in Dresden, by 1821 owning 1150 acres of land in that town. He became one of the heaviest tax-payers in the town, where he died in 1855.

By the 1790s, the majority of slaves being brought to the United States came via the West Indies. Our little local schooner became an indispensable part of the trade in human flesh, as much a part of it as the larger vessels making the infamous Middle Passage from Africa. Opposition to the trade was growing at the same time, and by 1808 federal law prohibited importation of slaves. American vessels could still carry slaves between foreign countries until 1820, but at that date any transportation of slaves became a form of piracy, carrying the death penalty. The only person to pay the full penalty of this law was Captain Nathaniel Gordon of Portland, Maine, who was captured aboard his New York vessel and executed in 1862. The trade of shipping slaves did not end completely until the abolition of slavery.



# Summer Volunteering

by Ellen Conner, Volunteer Coordinator

The summer season is well underway, and our volunteer crew is at full speed ahead. Maintenance volunteers have been busy painting the Donnell House shutters, working on the Fitting Out Pier, mowing the lawn, weeding and watering the flower gardens and otherwise keeping the Museum looking its very best. Curatorial volunteers carry on the continuous task of accessioning and cataloging, researching, and preparing the galleries for new exhibits. The foggy weather has kept our guides, greeters, demo, Museum Store and *Sherman Zwicker* volunteers on the go, welcoming, touring, directing and otherwise giving our visitors the best possible Maine Maritime Museum experience.

Upcoming volunteer events and opportunities include the annual picnic in September (date TBA), Quartermasters Day (Oct. 16) and Pirates Party (Oct. 30). The final volunteer event of the year will be the Holiday Recognition Celebration on December 7.

THANKS FOR ALL YOU DO!!!

[Editor's Note: Ellen has turned a page in her life and moved to Western Australia. We wish her well.]

## For the best in Maritime books... Remember the Museum Store

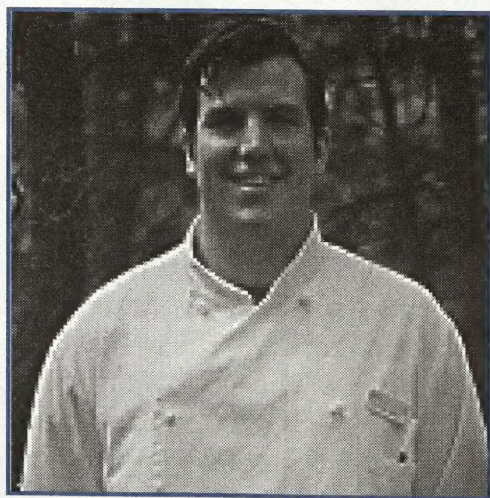
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**VOLUNTEER PICNIC, Thursday, September 9th • 5 PM to 7 PM • RSVP with Mary  
SEE YOU THERE!**

## Chef's Corner

*"This summer soup is best served in a chilled bowl with a warm slice of crostini"*



Thomas Breen, Food and Beverage  
Director and Executive Chef,  
Sebasco Harbor Resort, the  
Museum's Hospitality Partner.

### Gazpacho

- 3 tablespoons garlic
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2/3 cup of vegetable oil
- 7 shots of Tabasco Sauce
- 20 peeled, diced and deseeded tomatoes
- 2 cups tomato juice
- 1 red pepper, finely sliced
- 1 green pepper, finely sliced
- 1 yellow pepper, finely sliced
- 2 cups diced onions (blanch in boiling, salted water)
- 1/2 cup diced celery
- 5 cups College Inn Chicken Broth
- 1/2 cup chiffonade basil
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 5 large peeled, deseeded cucumbers
- salt and pepper to taste

Place garlic, lemon juice, honey, Tabasco Sauce and sugar in a mixing bowl. Whisk all ingredients to make smooth, then slowly add 2/3 cup of vegetable oil. Add tomatoes, cucumbers, colored peppers, blanched onions and chicken broth. Leave in cooler overnight.

Before serving, add basil and salt and pepper to taste.

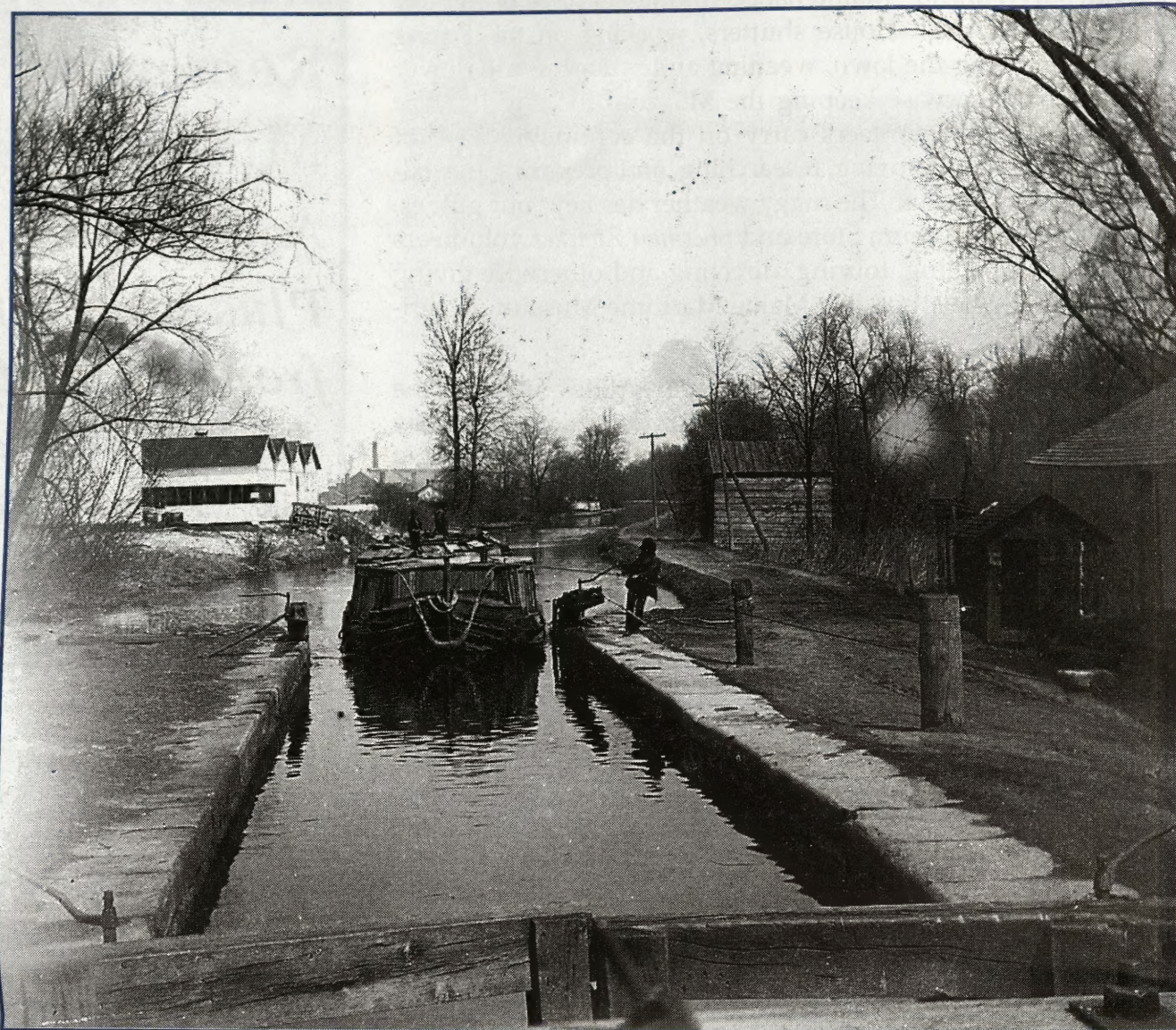
Serves 12



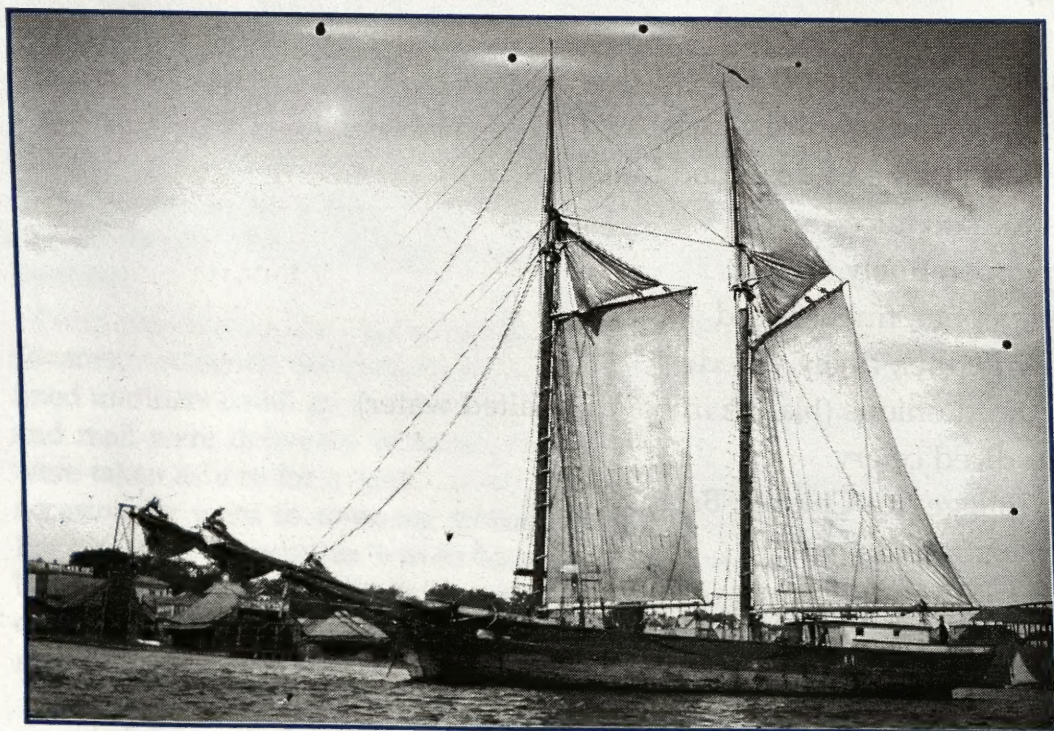
# Puzzler

## From The Library

**A New Puzzler.** Does this canal scene ring a bell with anyone? It comes from a photograph album donated to the Museum in 1966 by Robert Rollins, with no information on who took the photographs or when. Most of the photographs are Maine scenes, but there are several canal scenes like this one, that seem out of place. Is this a Maine canal? Is that an ice house in the background? If you recognize the place, please reply to Nathan Lipfert, (207) 443-1316, extension 328, or [lipfert@bathmaine.com](mailto:lipfert@bathmaine.com), or at the Museum's mailing address.



## Last Issue's Puzzler:



We did get a response about this schooner from Gordon Bok, who was struck by the similarities to the Massachusetts schooner *Lulu W. Eppes*, operating late in her career with a home port of Ellsworth, Maine. The two schooners are, in fact, identical in rig, general appearance, and what is visible of deck layout. Close examination, however, reveals that the mystery schooner has several tiny differences from the *Eppes*: more space between the main chain plates and the forward end of the poop's bulwark; great depth of stern (poop deck to counter); white-painted doublings; different-shaped bow chock; different lightboards. Also, our schooner has no nameboard attached to her poop bulwarks, unlike the *Eppes* in every photo known to our staff. So, we thank Gordon for noticing the many similarities between the schooners, but we remain unconvinced. Still, the *Lulu W. Eppes* is a closer match than any other vessel we have found, so perhaps someone will be able to explain away the differences at some point.

Nathan R. Lipfert, Curator & Library Director